

**THE LADOC 'KEYHOLE' SERIES**  
Latin Americans Look Into Their Social and Religious Problems

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**EL SALVADOR I**

**VOICES**

**of the**

**CHURCH**

ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ARNULFO ROMERO Y GALDAMEZ

Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdamez was born in Ciudad Barrios, Province of San Miguel, on August 15, 1917. His parents were Señor Santos Romero and Doña Guadalupe de Jesus Galdamez. He attended minor and major seminaries in El Salvador until 1937. After studies from 1937 to 1943 at the Gregorian University, Rome, he obtained a Licentiate in Theology. He was ordained to the priesthood in Rome, April 4, 1942.

Upon his return to El Salvador he was assigned to various posts in the diocese of San Miguel. In 1967 he was named Secretary General of the Bishops Conference and Executive Secretary of the Bishops Conference of Central America and Panama (CEDAC). On April 4, 1967 Pope Paul VI named him titular bishop of Tambee. He became auxiliary bishop to the archbishop of San Salvador, Monseñor Luis Chavez y Gonzalez on May 3, 1970. He was designated President of the Commission of Communications and National Director of Missions. On October 15, 1974 he was named titular bishop of the diocese of Santiago de Maria. Following the resignation of Archbishop Chavez, Romero was appointed to the archdiocese of San Salvador, February 3, 1977.

He was assassinated on March 24, 1980.

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# SECRET

1. The purpose of this document is to provide information regarding the activities of the [redacted] in the [redacted] area.

2. The [redacted] has been observed in the [redacted] area, and it is believed that it is engaged in [redacted] activities.

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*Pocket-handkerchief-size El Salvador runs the gamut of problems: illiteracy, criminal inequality of distribution of wealth, strikes, kidnappings, tortures, assassinations, election frauds, guerrillas and it ranks among the five most malnourished countries in the world. Possession of the land is a basic issue. The nation's economy depends on the production of coffee, cotton and sugar and 60% of the 5 million Salvadorans depend on agriculture for a living. However, 58% of the land is in the hands of 2% of wealthy owners. Out of this context comes the recent pastoral letter of the Salvadoran Episcopal Conference. One week later, 49-year-old Jesuit Father Rutilo Grande Garcia, outspoken defender of peasant rights, was fatally gunned down along with two companions, on his way to celebrate evening Mass.*

### **SALVADORAN PASTORAL LETTER: THE SITUATION TODAY** (Taken from CELAM, March, 1977 No. 114.)

Beloved Salvadorans:

In the name of the Bishops' Conference of El Salvador we address you in these times of uncertainty and anguish, in which the conscience of every citizen and every Christian feels deeply concerned about our beloved country. The events of these last few months and recent days which are known to everyone, oblige us to speak out clearly, calmly but firmly. As pastors of the People of God who have been entrusted to us we cannot evade this responsibility. Neither will we by silence show a lack of interest nor a resigned and passive acceptance of these recurrent deplorable events.

The situation of our people who have no voice with which to encourage and channel their hopes and help them to become aware as Christians and citizens, moves us to speak. With trust in the power that the Lord gives us and confident in the nobility of our people whose hope never wanes, especially among the very oppressed, we invite you to consider the following reflections with the hope of shedding light on our Christian procedure and to nourish confidence which has been severely tested in these days.



## I. FACTS WHICH TROUBLE US

In recent months sad things have been occurring some of which are public knowledge since they have appeared in the news media, while news of others circulates by word of mouth and is either ignored or distorted by communications media. These events pertain to the Church--which has often been maligned--and also to the whole country. We briefly list the things that overwhelm us with sadness and perplexity.

a) There has been expanded repression of peasants and all who accompany them in their legitimate awakening of consciousness.

b) There has been an increase in the number of dead and missing persons in circumstances which have not been duly clarified. Also there has been an increase in torture as a means of intimidation.

c) This has worsened in the post-election environment, resulting in distress for the general public and especially for families affected by the death or disappearance of some of their members.

d) The Church has been openly attacked in a campaign by FARO and ANEP, not excepting the well-respected Bishop Luis Chavez y Gonzalez.

e) There has been not only a concerted drive in the press but also the use of other means to threaten and intimidate priests, laity, institutions and Christian-oriented publications.

f) Lately the government has expelled worthy foreign priests without explanation nor customary previous dialogue between military authorities and the Church. This attitude of the military authorities makes us fear that expulsion of foreign priests will continue; entry of new ones will be difficult; and threats to nationals will go on.

Summarizing the above, we see in jeopardy the human rights of Salvadorans and also those foreign priests who have identified with our people for the good of the country.

## II. THE MEANING OF THESE EVENTS

The gravity of these acts expresses a great and deeply-rooted evil. Everyone knows our country lives in extreme social conditions. Statistics and day-to-day living with the majority poor confirm it. Despite frequent mention, what Medellin said about our continent (and which applies to our country) bears repetition: the most appalling state of our times is the generalized misery of large human groups. This situation has been described as "collective injustice" and "institutionalized violence" (Doc. No. 2, PEACE).

We all wish this were not so, but this is the way it is and it will not change unless we look at the majority poor and search for solutions instead of at the minority rich who wish to maintain and augment their social, economic and political power. This analysis is simple and independent of concrete ideologies. It is rather a moral judgment that upsurges from Christian faith: this cannot remain so. We cannot continue to answer like Cain, if not in words then in actions: "Am I my brother's guardian? (Gen. 4:9). Or like the priest and the levite in the parable who "passed by on the other side." (Luke 10:31-32).

This is the fundamental sin that we as pastors must denounce. We cannot ignore the people nor treat them and their aspirations lightly. As long as there is no serious attempt to solve the distribution of wealth and land, participation in politics, organization of the rural and urban inhabitants, then people are being ignored as citizens and sons of God.

The Church and all Christians are going through a painful and real process of conversion. Since Vatican II and especially after Medellin, there is an awareness that God says "No" to our sin of omission; and in a greater or lesser measure we are collaborating for a more human society which we know is the approximation

of the Kingdom of God. Not only in our country but in many others in Latin America, whenever Christians and the official Church are faithful to the prophetic mission of denouncing sin and working towards a more just society which cares for its dispossessed and marginated, whether they are peasants, laborers, Indians, or slum-dwellers, the reaction is always the same: the power structures bear down upon these Christians and there have been deaths, disappearances, expulsions and threats.

### III. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

In these times of confusion when it seems that some wish to discredit the mission and activities of the Church, it is necessary to recall once again just what her mission is. The Church is the depository of faith and tradition concerning Jesus Christ, which through the Spirit of Jesus, enliven and actuate all who choose to follow Him. The Church must continue the mission and role of Jesus Christ the evangelizer: "Proclaim from town to town, above all to the poor who very often are the most disposed to listen, the joyful news of the fulfillment of the promises and the Covenant offered by God." (Evangelii Nuntiandi, No. 15,6.) In a word, announce the Kingdom of God. (Evangelii Nuntiandi, No. 6). In the preface of the Feast of Christ the King we say the Kingdom is one of peace and justice, of truth and love, of grace and holiness. Even though we know that the Kingdom on earth will always be partial and incomplete, the Church must exert all her strength to promote it. In our particular situation this means to struggle and promote justice, know the truth, and achieve political, social and economic measures conformable to the plan of God. This supposes unmasking those who have put a false humanization in profit, social position, in power, in privilege, and return dignity and material means to the forgotten and marginated peoples. In a word, the Church has to work to make our society more human and just. Just as injustice is very tangible and concrete, so likewise must be the promotion of justice.



No one should be surprised that the Church inspires, orientates, and projects concrete mechanisms to achieve justice. Sometimes these may be questioned but the Church too must learn which steps will better bring about the Kingdom of God. At this level the Church, like other human institutions which try to promote justice, will evaluate and criticize her achievements and her mistakes. To struggle for justice, peace, human development and defense of the basic rights of man is not politics, rather it is working for the common good. (1971 Synod of Bishops, "Justice," "Priestly Ministry.")

So even at the risk of being misunderstood or persecuted, the Church cannot avoid raising her voice when injustice has taken hold of society. She cannot remain silent when human rights are trampled upon, whether in institutionalized form or in concrete cases as mentioned above. In our case we do not make accusations for the sake of revenge nor to play games for personal interests. Our denunciation is in response to fidelity to Him who unmasked sin wherever it was found: in the Pharisees, priests, the wealthy, in Herod or in Pilate. The Church knows that whoever denounces sin in others must be ready to denounce her own; but this does not exempt her from the grave responsibility of condemning sin wherever it is found, whether this is in the hearts of men or in oppressive structures.

The Church like Jesus cannot nor should she exclude anyone from evangelization and in the accomplishment of the Kingdom of God. Rich and poor, powerful and dispossessed. But each are called in different ways and the Church ought to give clear indications that she is on the side of the dispossessed, those who are generally ignored. As in the case of Jesus, this will give rise to persecution, lack of understanding on the part of the powerful, surprised perhaps that the Church bothers about the things of this world, and annoyed because this mission is a threat.

The Church cannot be indifferent to a situation where some have huge landholdings and others lack the minimum of subsistence; where some have access to culture, entertainment, and high living and others struggle for day-to-day existence without employment, suffering hunger that drags them to tragic extremes of malnutrition. The Church will collaborate with all persons of good will who work for the coming of the Kingdom of God. She will have no social prejudices against those who endeavor to bring education, housing, organization, culture, where it does not exist.

The Church knows that the servant is no greater than the Master, that she must fulfill through her members the presence of Christ in history, make up that which is wanting in the passion of Christ, as St. Paul says (Col. 1:24). The Church does not fear misunderstanding or persecution.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In closing this Pastoral Message we wish to address especially those whom we wish to serve, those who have recently been expelled from our country, have disappeared, feel threatened or are being tortured. Urged by our Christian conscience and pastoral obligation and with no other motive than to help towards a more just and fraternal community of all Salvadorans, we make the following just demands:

1. Let every type of violence cease, on the part of social groups, para-military organizations, Security Police and the Army.

2. Let there be security guarantee for life and property for all citizens, including those who are imprisoned for political reasons or in hiding for fear of reprisals, so that all may be reincorporated into public life.

3. Let there be a stop to every kind of torture to obtain extrajudicial confessions.

4. Let there be an end to persecution and arbitrary expulsion of citizens, foreign or national priests. In the case of priests there should be dialogue between military and ecclesiastical authorities.

5. In the exceptional circumstances of state of siege, there must be strict adherence to legality with no abuse of power.

6. Let there be no further transgression of basic human rights as mentioned above.

We Salvadorans and all Christians desire to live together in peace in our country. It is impossible to obtain lasting peace without true justice. Therefore we direct all our efforts to this end. It is fitting to add the words of Paul VI who says one cannot achieve peace without respect for life and the basic rights of the person. (1977 Peace Day Message.)

During this season of Lent we commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus. We can follow in His footsteps to the extent we change from a criterion of sin to one of grace and holiness, from a life of injustice to one of justice in love.

We give you our heartfelt blessing.

San Salvador, March 5, 1977.

For the Episcopal Conference (CEDES) the Standing Committee:

Pedro Arnaldo Aparicio y Q.  
Bishop of San Vicente  
President of CEDES

Oscar A. Romero  
Archbishop of San Salvador  
Vice-President of CEDES

Marco Rene Revelo  
Auxiliary Bishop of Santa Ana  
Member of Standing Committee

Freddy Delgado A.  
Secretary General of CEDES

San Salvador, the smallest (8,260 square miles) of the Central American republics, has a population of about 3 1/2 million people who are mostly mestizos. There are no tribal Indians and few Negroes. A group of priests representing the Clergy Coordinating Commission are ruffling the feathers of the cattlemen, cotton and coffee producers who oppose the priests' defense of the peasants. Ninety percent of the peasants are landless and 45% of the economically active population is either unemployed or underemployed. The priests called the attention of FARO (Ranchers Front of the Eastern Region), ANEP (National Association of Private Businessmen) and AGES (El Salvador's Cattlemen's Association) to their "sin of prolonging the institutional violence" of exploited people.

### **SALVADORAN PRIESTS DEFEND MINISTRY AMONG PEASANTS**

(The following is a Latinamerica Press translation, Lima, 3rd of February 1977, of the text published in San Salvador newspapers.)

In our desire to be faithful to the Kingdom of God, we meet today to reaffirm our commitment to the poor. This means that we consecrate our lives and our ministry in the church to the service of the neediest and most oppressed people. Accordingly, we proclaim the plan of salvation as it is expressed in the word of God:

- a) That God, our Father, has created the things of this world for all people. All hoarding and abuse of what God created is sin.
- b) Misery, hunger and injustice do not come from God, but from men of ill will, who go against God's plan.
- c) God sent his Son to save people. He revealed the original plan of the Father. It was his commitment to conquer sin--which is injustice and oppression--that led him to his death.
- d) Jesus called men to build the Kingdom of God. It was principally the poor who heard his call and responded.
- e) Christ told us, "I have overcome sin." We shouldn't be afraid; we'll triumph.

For proclaiming these truths of God's word we are called "Communists," and are slandered for "violating the basic principles of Christianity," for "inciting to violence," etc. Our role, however, is to announce the truth, to be witnesses to the love of God through the expression of brotherhood and equality. It seems

to us that these gospel truths condemn the selfish, narrow interests of the members of FARO, ANEP and AGES for prolonging the institutionalized violence against the majority of the people.

For centuries Latin America, including El Salvador, has been a continent of violence. It is violence which a few privileged people have practiced against the masses of an exploited people ever since colonial times. It is the violence of hunger, abandonment and misery; it is the violence of persecution, oppression and ignorance.

Therefore, we concur with the call for action of the Archbishop of San Salvador on December 11, 1976, to raise the consciousness of the church in order to defend the people who are struggling for their liberation. We see in the struggle for liberation an episode in the history of the Kingdom of God and that is why we are committed to this people, of which we are also a part.

Since the church has assumed the prophetic role of being faithful to Jesus Christ, we say that to attack any member of it is to attack the whole church. We openly condemn the attitude of those persons who slander and defame us in order to *divide* the church of God in our country. We denounce the partiality and the precipitance with which Salvadoran campesinos are indicted and sentenced. Those who are guilty of this practice have launched calumnious judgments against the church and the people. They are manipulating the truth to their advantage.

We call upon our companions in the faith to reflect on these events and discover behind them the unjust system which oppresses people. This system has been developing in Latin America for many years. It has produced its *martyrs* in our country and on the whole continent. We ask our companions to cooperate with a church which, as part of the proclamation of the gospel in this context, is taking up the *cause of the poor* and the struggle against injustice.

Clergy Coordinating Commission  
San José de la Montaña Seminary  
San Salvador, Dec. 14, 1976.

*Escalating violence and the frontal attack against the Catholic Church from business groups and the military government prompted the second message this year from the Catholic Bishops Conference of El Salvador. In their non-partisan statement they address the people in positions of political and economic power as well as all citizens to search for justice in order to end violence and halt the trend to totalitarianism. El Salvador is the smallest (8,260 square miles) and most densely-populated (5 million inhabitants) country of the Central American republics.*

**EL SALVADOR'S BISHOPS: A CALL TO END VIOLENCE AND  
PROMOTE JUSTICE**

(This pastoral letter appeared in Latinamerica Press  
23 June 1977.)

We bishops of El Salvador, deeply concerned over the present situation in the country and in the Church, speak to Salvadoran people as follows:

**SOLIDARITY WITH THE ARCHBISHOP AND THE FAMILIES WHO SUFFER**

We join the Archbishop of San Salvador in condemning the wave of violence, hatred, calumny and revenge which has put the country in mourning. We share the pain that hurts him as a Pastor for the cruel assassination of two priests of his jurisdiction and the innocent victims who died with them.

We too suffer with the parents, wife and children of Mauricio Borgonovo Pohl;<sup>1</sup> with parents of young Luis Alfredo Torres<sup>2</sup> with those who mourn the cruel death of Roberto Poma<sup>3</sup> and the humble employees who shared his misfortune; and with the many fathers, mothers, wives and children in this hour of horror--which fills us with shame before the civilized world--who weep inconsolably over the death and disappearance of their loved ones.



## THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH ON MATERIALISM

The Church believes in God the Creator, in Jesus Christ the Redeemer and in the Holy Spirit the Sanctifier. The Church believes that the world is called to be subject to Jesus Christ through a gradual institution of the Kingdom of God. The Church believes in the Communion of Saints and in the love that unites all people, called to be the children of God, and believes in the Kingdom of God as the progressive change of the world of sin to a world of love and justice, which begins now in this world and has its fulfillment in eternity. Therefore:

- A. The Church condemns Marxism-Communism which by ideology and revolutionary practice denies God and all spiritual values by calling them alienating in order to base everything on matter; it exploits class differences in society and uses man as a means to establish a political power in accordance with its ideology.
- B. But with the same forcefulness the Church condemns the liberal capitalist system which, although it confesses God, nevertheless in practice denies Him by putting faith in profit "as the key motive for human progress" (*Populorum Progressio*, 26). It uses man as an instrument to increase wealth by leaving him in poverty and in this way promoting class differences in society; it tramples on human rights, dignity and even life itself to maintain its control of economic, political and social power.
- C. The specific contribution of the Church and liberating Christians should not be confused with "tactical attitudes or with service to a political system." The Church contributes by giving "a motivation of brotherly love, a doctrine to which Christians must not only pay attention but also make the basis of their prudence and experience in order to translate it into action, participation and commitment."

## FALSE "TRADITIONALISM" IN THE LIGHT OF PASTORAL CRITERIA

With equal strength we reprove as antievangelical the falsely called "traditionalist" stance of those who pretend to "make use" of religious attitudes to prolong intolerable situations as if Christianity preached passivity, inertia, a false resignation and sought to form a spirit of slavery."<sup>4</sup>

We would betray our mission as pastors if we should reduce evangelization to mere practices of individual piety and spiritualized sacramentalism.

As Paul VI says:

*Evangelization, would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development-- a message especially energetic today about liberation. (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 29.)*

We cannot be indifferent and calmly watch the dispossessed and marginalized people and those who have no voice, desperately struggle

*"to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustice.... The Church has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings...the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete.... (E.N., 30.)*

The Pope adds:

*Between evangelization and human advancement there are profound links. These include links of an anthropological order...links in the theological order, since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption which touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored. They include links of the eminently evangelical order, which is that of charity... (E.N., 31.)*

## AN URGENT INVITATION

We make a fervent appeal to all Salvadorans. Let us join in a calm reflection and frank dialogue so that passion may not lead us to adopt criteria and make decisions that injure the dignity of people and their fundamental rights. We appeal to those who have economic and political power. Together with all the vital forces of the country let us look for a way to make social justice effective as the only solution to prevent the country from falling into violence and one or another type of totalitarianism.

If the holders of power persist obstinately in the pursuit of their own interests and forget the cry of the dispossessed they will create an environment favorable to totalitarian violence.

*The true struggle against Marxism consists in eliminating the causes that give birth to Marxism and in changing the culture medium in which it develops, in offering an alternative to replace it. Often, however, the anti-Marxists are the ones that create the evil they try to combat. Another aid to Marxism, although not intended to be such, is to consider as a Marxist or suspect of Marxism anyone who struggles for man's dignity, justice and equality, who asks for participation or who opposes arrogance.<sup>5</sup>*

So that this reflection may be authentic and free of all passion it must be founded on truth, animated by charity, illuminated by the Word of God revealed in the Sacred Scriptures and explained for our time in the documents of the Magisterium of the Church: Vatican Council II, the Episcopal Council of Medellin, the teachings of the Pope and the bishops. The Bishop, jointly with the Pope, is the only authorized instructor to teach the authentic doctrine of the Church.

### A CALL TO PEACE AND UNITY

In the name of God we call urgently and anxiously for peace and unity. Let the systematic campaign of calumny and defamation of the Church cease--defamation

and calumny which are now being directed against some national and foreign priests, as well as against the Company of Jesus and the Salvadoran Episcopacy. It is a campaign which, directed from the shadow of anonymity, tries to choke off and silence the voice of the Church and justify the most reprehensible violations of human rights.

In the name of an afflicted nation, "in this hour of the power of evil and darkness," we sound an urgent call to unity, forgiveness, truth and fervent prayer.

Catholics: "Be not afraid," we say to you with the Pope, "for the Church this is an hour of encouragement and truth in the Lord" (Paul VI, Aug. 24, 1968.)

With Mary, the faithful Virgin, the poor Virgin, the handmaid of the Lord, let us be serene and strong at the foot of the cross (*cf. Jn. 19:25*).

San Salvador, May 17, 1977.

With our blessing,

#### FOR THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Bishop Pedro Arnoldo Aparicio y Quintanilla  
(San Vicente), President of CEDES

Freddy Delgado A., General Secretary  
of CEDES

#### Footnotes

1. Foreign Relations Minister, kidnapped by leftist Popular Liberation Forces April 19 who demanded freedom for 37 political prisoners as the condition for his release; executed May 11 when demands were not met.
2. Killed when rightist White Warriors Union machine-gunned Fr. Alfonso Navarro May 12.

3. El Salvador's Tourist Institute president and wealthy industrialist killed Jan. 29, 1977, two days after he was kidnapped; his three bodyguards and driver were killed at the time he was seized.
4. Cf. 32nd Assembly of the Bishops' Conference of Colombia, "Christian identity in action for justice" 1976, No. 129.
5. Bishops' Conference of Chile, "Gospel and Peace. CELAM Documentation, Year 1 No. 2, March-April 1976, p. 33; LP, Oct. 16, 1975.

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*The Divine command par excellence--"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26)--did not end when God created the first man and made him Lord of paradise. It is still a command to all people to make the world a suitable place for humanity. Obedience to this command perfects people and benefits those who obey it. God has engraved it in human consciousness so that in every culture and in every epoch of history the sense of what is human enables people to discover their worth and seek a social structure to serve their needs.*

*The Church's contribution to the search for solutions is guided by its social teachings. God put man in the world as king over creatures and he trusts that man will finish and perfect creation for the benefit of all humanity.*

*In El Salvador today people are experiencing hunger. They are becoming poorer; they live uncertain of tomorrow. We maintain a social structure in which the well-being of people is overlooked. People are further oppressed by the continual violation of human rights. They are not only forgotten, they are persecuted. Therefore, we need a conversion of the few (in power) in order to achieve reconciliation with all our brothers and sisters. It is for this reason that I seek the attention of all who hold political, social, economic, intellectual or cultural power in our nation. We need to build a more just society for the good of all Salvadorans tomorrow and this implies some sacrifices today.*

**(Excerpts from a pastoral letter of Archbishop Luis Chavez y Gonzalez of San Salvador, March 30, 1975. He has since retired to Santiago de Maria.)**

*Since national elections in February, 1977, tension between the military backed by large landholders and church workers seeking social reforms for the peasant population has increased. The situation was aggravated this year when coffee growers refused to increase wages despite the great profits resulting from the high international coffee prices. At the same time thousands of unemployed peasants are demanding unused lands for cultivation. During Holy Week a combat at San Perulapan and neighboring villages between the army and organized peasant forces resulted in 29 deaths and more than 50 wounded. Earlier two priests were assassinated along with a dozen or more lay leaders. In a communique to all the parishes Archbishop Carlos Romero of San Salvador pleads for peace.*

**COMMUNIQUE FROM THE ARCHBISHOP OF SAN SALVADOR**  
(Mimeo copy dated March 31, 1978).

Archbishop Oscar Romero y Galdamez, in the name of his Auxiliary Bishop Arturo Rivera Damas, the clergy and religious congregations of the archdiocese of El Salvador, submits the following communication to be read in all the parishes.

We are all deeply aware of the tragic situation of our country, especially the recent occurrence in San Pedro Perulapan. Police tactics, the mounting number of dead and wounded, the "disappeared," the peasants who have lost their homes or have been forced to abandon them, all these actions urge us to speak out and shed the light which issues from our Christian faith.

As shepherds of the People of God we wish first of all to remind you of the parable of the Good Samaritan who encountered a wounded man on the road. Today in many parts of our country we find different kinds of wounded people. We cannot ignore this reality by taking a roundabout road, as did the priest and the levite in the parable. Rather we are impelled like the Samaritan, to approach and heal the wounds.

Without factional interest we desire to know the truth of what is happening. We ask for a straightforward



account of the events, since the versions we receive are partial, confused and even contradictory. One is the official explanation, another is the interpretation of the media and still another is the description of witnesses. The press is uncertain in its information and therefore we request that channels for checking sources be set up so that there be some guarantee of true and impartial facts. Persons directly implicated and officially accused should have voice. This is what the Church demands for everyone. Moreover, ordered society requires it and especially when life itself is in jeopardy.

We again emphatically state that this Archbishopric has never defended violence nor has it been responsible for it in any way. In the January message, the bishops recalled that the Church declares: NO TO VIOLENCE, YES TO PEACE. The accusation that the Church is inciting violence is false and calumnious. We repeat this because certain factions are unconvinced and blame the Church for evils that actually emerge from the unjust structures of society. Our venerable predecessor, Archbishop Luis Chavez y Gonzales, had to defend himself against this slander in a communique of December 1, 1976. We have reiterated it countless times in our homilies, statements and pastoral letters. It ought to be very clear that the Church does not promote violence.

Study of the roots of violence indicates that as long as there is no social and political climate which permits the peasants to present their urgent needs and just demands, disturbing outbreaks will unfortunately increase. If all channels for dialogue are suppressed, all efforts to organize in defense of their legitimate interests subdued, all peaceful demonstrations quashed, then--as we commented in our January message on the law of guarantee and public order--violent incidents will multiply. We repeat, therefore, the urgency for a political environment which allows the peasants to express their needs with freedom.

However, this is not enough unless it is accompanied by the will to change the unjust structures of society. Only this will eliminate oppression and institutionalized violence. The Church believes in peace but she knows this is neither the absence of violence nor is it obtained by oppressive violence. True peace is only achieved through justice. We like to believe that no Salvadoran citizen of good will wishes violence, struggles between brother peasants or military maneuvers. However peace can only be accomplished through the difficult and arduous but urgent task to distribute more equitably the wealth of the country among all Salvadorans.

Therefore we call on all Salvadorans of good will to cooperate for true peace and to promote justice. We condemn once again institutionalized violence and those acts of violence that inevitably inspire violent auto-defense. Anything less means we will never get out of the spiral of violence.

We summon everyone to reflection and prudence. Our country cannot continue this. We must overcome indifference that makes many citizens into mere spectators of the volatile situation in the countryside. We must combat egoism that keeps people from sharing. We must return to the profound evangelical truth that we serve the poor.

We also call on the government to facilitate peace within the country. One way would be a reasonable and generous amnesty to give proof that peace among Salvadorans is sincerely desired. This would be a first step for dialogue which would lead to further steps to construct a better social order.

We petition all to join in prayer for the deceased and their families, that they rest in the peace of the Lord and that their loved ones may reconstruct their lives. We also suggest generous cooperation to help economically those families left without support, the homeless and the wounded.

In conclusion we suggest the same evangelical consideration with which we began. Our country is wounded and needs a good Samaritan. As shepherds of the People of God we desire that the truth be made clear and that the needs of the poor be heard. Let us all set ourselves to the task of building a just society and so rid ourselves of violence and instead construct peace.

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PAX

*More than 300 priests and religious of El Salvador sent a letter on March 7 to Archbishop Emmanuele Gerada, Papal Nuncio to El Salvador and Guatemala, rebuking him for support of the repressive Carlos Humberto Romero government and powerful business (ANEP) and agricultural (FARO) interests. They also accuse him of siding with Cardinal Casariego (Guatemala) and Bishop Eduardo Alvarez, El Salvador's military vicar, against Archbishop Oscar Romero and Galdamez (San Salvador) and Bishop Arturo Rivera Damas (Santiago de Maria.)*

## **SALVADORAN CLERGY CRITICIZE NUNCIO**

(Latinamerica Press 30 March 1978 translation of letter.)

Your Excellency:

We priests and religious of all the dioceses in the Republic of El Salvador who sign this letter feel a deep pastoral obligation to tell you our position regarding your public activities.

We endeavor to be respectful of your dignity as a representative of the Holy Father and as a person. We will try to avoid the formulation of judgments on your intentions and motives. But after serious reflection in the light of the Gospel, we reached the conviction that Jesus, the Lord of History, urges us to denounce those aspects of your activity which signify a grave scandal for the People of God and which are destructive of the church and its evangelizing mission.

Without listing at this time the anti-evangelical actions and omissions which attract our attention, we limit ourselves to enumerating some of the most salient aspects of your public conduct. We trust that your intelligence and your openness to grace will allow you to discover the remaining facts which are not mentioned here.

1. Your manifest dissent with the pastoral and prophetic line adopted by Archbishop Oscar Romero y Galdamez (San Salvador) in communion with all his clergy and all the apostolate lay movements.

2. Your public commitment to and support of the repressive and unjust government which is responsible for the constant persecution of campesinos, workers and all types of nongovernment organizations of the common people and especially of Christians, catechists and even our brothers in the priesthood.

3. Your public interference in strictly pastoral matters such as the "concelebration" of the Eucharist in the last Mass of Father Esquivel, a disobedient priest who rebelled against the hierarchy and was rejected by all the clergy for his commitment to the power groups and for his attachment to the economic advantages in a parish of the most privileged strata of society.

4. Your insensitivity to the silent pain of persecuted and oppressed campesinos, to the weeping of the widows and mothers of the people who have "disappeared" for political reasons and to our peoples' hunger for bread and for truth.

5. Your veiled maneuvers, in the FARO-ANEP line and with the cooperation of Cardinal Casariego (Guatemala) and Col. Eduardo Alvarez (Bishop of San Miguel), against the Archbishop of San Salvador, the Bishop of Santiago de Maria (Arturo Rivera Damas) and all who choose unconditional service for the Gospel and the truth.

For all this, your Excellency, Monsignor Gerada, we are under a Christian and moral obligation to express the following:

a. We feel you have placed yourself at the margin of the *faith, hope and charity* which our local church in El Salvador lives out and professes in communion with the Universal Church.

b. On behalf of our oppressed people and in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to whom we must give account of our Faith, we *repudiate* your acts which are a counter-sign (of the Gospel) and your collaboration with those who persecute the Church and the Gospel.

c. In loyalty to the Vicar of Christ, His Holiness Pope Paul, we ask you not to make the communion of our local church with the Holy See more difficult.

We pray to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of the living and the dead, to help you hear the cry of all the people in whom Jesus is daily dying and rising again.

We ask God that the blood of our martyrs may enlighten you so that you do not go on fighting against light and truth like Herod and Pilate.

May the Queen of Peace, Mother of the Savior, give you the strength to renounce the "human wisdom" of politicians and enjoy the freedom of the children of God.

For the love of God, do not make our Calvary more bitter at a time when the powerful of the earth have unleashed their iniquity against the Church and all the saints of God.

Sincerely,

(Signed by more than 300 priests and religious)



*Rural Salvadoran workers suffer continuing pressure from the government of General Carlos Humberto Romero. They are denied access to the communications media and thus cannot tell their side of the story as in the case of the recent clash in the San Pedro Perulapan region between peasants and armed forces. This prompted the following manifesto from two rural organizations to get attention from uninformed people within the country and abroad. With 6000 persons in their ranks, the FECCAS-UTC identify themselves as members of the People's Revolutionary (PRB) which joins them with the national teachers' association, an organization of marginal urban dwellers and federations of university and secondary school students.*

### **SALVADORAN PEASANT ORGANIZATIONS' MANIFESTO ON VIOLENCE** (Translation from Latinamerica Press, 4 May 1978.)

The Salvadoran Christian Peasants' Federation (FECCAS) and the Union of Rural Workers (UTC) address themselves again to the exploited and oppressed sectors of our people, as well as to the rest of the world, about the events which took place in San Pedro Perulapan. Our purpose is to reveal and denounce the publicity campaign in the press, radio and television that the government is waging against our organizations in order to confuse public opinion, both national and international. By this campaign the government is trying to hide the massacring and torturing of hundreds of rural workers because they are demanding improved living conditions and at least subsistence wages for an honest day's work.

On Sunday, March 19, 40 members of ORDEN ( a government-controlled paramilitary force) directed by their leaders Victor Perez and Catarino Santos--began to attack the canton of El Rodeo. For over a month the mayors of San Pedro Perulapan, Perulapia and San Martin have been mobilizing the ORDEN bands and local patrols of the various cantons in their jurisdiction to attack the organized workers who belong to FECCAS-UTC.

For a long time President Romero has been preparing a widespread defamation campaign and cruel repression

aimed at destroying our organizations. Lately he has intensified this campaign. He is trying to get at those of us who untiringly struggle to better our way of life. His purpose is to isolate our organizations from the rest of the people and to make them indifferent to our glorious struggle.

Therefore we declare the following:

1. That the government's statement as made in newspapers and radio broadcasts accusing our organizations of threatening to burn down San Pedro Perulapan are completely false. As a matter of fact, all our members have abandoned the cantons of the region because of the brutal persecution unleashed by ORDEN and the army. Besides, at no time have we been interested in destroying the houses of our companions or in doing anything that goes against the possessions and interests of the common people.

2. That the people who live there are witnesses that the persons who have occupied the cantons of El Paraiso, San Francisco, Tecoluco, La Esperanza, La Loma and El Rodeo since Sunday, March 26, belong to ORDEN.

3. That those who have destroyed the houses of our companions, burning clothing, corn, etc. are members of ORDEN.

4. That especially after Holy Week they have intensified their campaign of defamation in order to justify a brutal repression of rural workers and other inhabitants of the zone.

5. That the mayors, judges and commanders of San Martin, San Bartolome Perulapia and San Pedro Perulapan organized armed canton bands and agents of ORDEN so that under the direction of Guardsmen in plainclothes they would attack the cantons of La Esperanza, Tecoluco, El Rodeo, San Francisco and La Loma and create a state of panic among the inhabitants.

6. That since Monday, March 20, the mayor and commander of Perulapan have been bringing the families of those who belong to ORDEN and lodging them in the school and the municipal building. Thus the people belonging to

FECCAS and the UTC remain in the cantons and ORDEN agents are able to round them up, arrest and rob them, as well as rape their women.

7. That in view of the brutal massacre which is occurring our members, when they saw their houses destroyed, their relatives assassinated and wives or daughters raped, on some occasions and in legitimate defense, had to repel the attacks of the ORDEN bands.

8. That since Tuesday, March 28, at about 11:00 p.m., combined forces of the army and ORDEN agents, aided by the mayor, judge and commander of San Martin, occupied the city; and on Wednesday morning, March 29, they blocked all access to the city by private vehicles and buses.

9. That since then we members of FECCAS and UTC announce that all actions that harm persons who live in this region or their possessions will be the responsibility of the government of our country.

10. That on Wednesday, beginning early in the morning, the army invaded the town of Tejetepeque and Cinquera, evicting the heroic inhabitants of the "Evaristo Menjivar" land invasion that our organizations sponsored there.

11. That when the army and the ORDEN bands could not find our members they deployed their troops in the cantons of the region; and we fear they are performing the same criminal deeds they did in San Pedro Perulapan.

12. That all the buses that circulate in the zone of San Martin, Ilobasco, Suchitoto and vicinity are being searched by the military and ORDEN bands.

13. We of FECCAS and UTC ask all the people aware of this situation of terror and persecution of our organizations to stand with us in solidarity and give us your moral and material support.

TEACHERS: In the classroom denounce these attacks against the workers and ask for economic aid for all our companions affected by the atrocities of the ORDEN bands and the army.

**STUDENTS:** Suspend your classes for at least a day in repudiation of this crime, and explain to your relatives and friends what the real situation is.

**WORKERS:** In the same way spread news of the events and raise the level of awareness of this tragic situation of the workers in the San Pedro Perulapan region.

**MARKET WOMEN:** Denounce these deeds and give financial help when we ask you; in addition, circulate our publicity.

**PRIESTS:** Denounce this situation in your parishes and provide the necessary help to sustain our members.

**CATHOLIC SCHOOLS:** Announce to all Salvadoran people the grief we rural workers suffer from this persecution and give us your financial support.

**PEOPLE OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE WORLD:** Do not let this government confuse you. It is a faithful defender of the interests of the creole bourgeoisie and Yankee imperialism. Demonstrate your solidarity with us by denouncing and condemning this new genocide of the fascist-type military tyranny which is no more than a continuation of the killing and repression carried out in Aguilares, Chalatenango, Tecoluca. Tres Calles, Leon de Piedras, Chinamequita and La Cayetana in San Salvador on February 28 and May 1, 1977 and February 28 and March 17, 1978. We ask all Salvadoran people and the peoples of Latin America and the whole world, by all means within their reach, to put pressure on this government to halt the repression of rural workers.

*Our people have begun their struggle and there are no forces capable of stopping their glorious march until they achieve their final victory.*

*Only the people, through their organized combative struggle, will stop the repression unleashed by the enemy!*

*For the fighting unity of rural workers!*

San Salvador, Central America, March 30, 1978

FECCAS-UTC, Members of the People's Revolutionary Bloc (BPR).

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*Tiny, overcrowded (550 persons per sq. mi.) El Salvador has over 4 million people with an average per capita income of \$440.00. The country is agriculturally wealthy; it produces cotton and coffee for the United States, West Germany, Holland and Japan. However 2% of the population owns 60% of the land. A recent Inter-American Human Rights Commission relates El Salvador's political crisis to the tremendous concentration of land ownership and of economic and political power in few hands and the consequent despair and misery of the peasants.*

*Because traditional political parties have been silenced by repression and a grassroots organization known as the Popular Revolutionary Bloc has been badly battered by arrests and disappearances, only Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador dares speak out against official violence and in favor of social reform. The Archbishop was recently nominated by the 118 members of the British Parliament for the Nobel Peace Prize for his defense of human rights.*

*As Archbishop Romero took a more defiant stance against arrest, tortures, murders and disappearances of Christian Democrat peasants and workers as well as priests, the Catholic hierarchy split. The articles which follow reflect the two different positions.*

### **BISHOPS CAUTION AGAINST FECCAS-UTC**

(Translated from El Mundo, San Salvador, Sept. 28, 1978.)

The political, economic and social crisis that afflicts the world is felt more acutely in our country every day. The paucity of our national territory, the scarcity of natural resources and the alarming demographic explosion, aggravated by the evident situation of social injustice repeatedly denounced by us, have provoked the clamorous reaction of the most deprived and voiceless sectors. Organized into various groups and through different ways they seek a solution to the grave problems that overwhelm them.

We know that a large sector of society acts with good will in seeking solutions. However, given the urgency to find immediate answers, many unwittingly adopt illicit means to achieve their goals. Among the organizations whose development and activities are currently

influential. We refer particularly to the "Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants" (FECCAS) and the "Union of Rural Workers" (UTC). In their efforts to win over the public, they have presented themselves as privileged organizations of the Church and have succeeded in enrolling more than a few pastoral agents in their unilateral political action.

FECCAS was organized to claim rights for the peasants. However, as a result of its political stance and desire for power, it soon coalesced with UTC. Then by affiliating with the "Popular Revolutionary Bloc" BPR, FECCAS and UTC declared themselves to be aligned with the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the BPR. Their proselytizing efforts led them to infiltrate Church groups, creating confusion and problems of conscience among Catholics.

From all sides we get the same anguished and importunate questions: does the Church accept class struggle and bloody revolution? Does she accept historical materialism and the consequent atheism? Should the mission of the Church be reduced to political commitment and/or action? Can we live our faith in a Marxist praxis? These and many other questions urge us to give a clear, informative reply that leaves no room for doubt or ambiguity.

We reaffirm what we have already said in the "Pro-nouncement of the Permanent Committee of the Episcopate" on December 14, 1976 and in the "Pastoral Exhortation" on July 11, 1975, regarding the right of association as a right of the natural order. Pope John XXIII in his encyclical Pacem in Terris said: "Men are by nature social, and consequently they have the right to meet together and to form associations with their fellows. They have the right to confer on such associations the type of organization which they consider best to achieve their objectives. They also have the right to exercise their own initiative and act on their own responsibility within these associations for the attainment of the



desired results." (No. 23) No one can deny to anyone the right of association to achieve just and honest ends without violating a natural right.

Regarding Marxism Pope Paul VI said: (The Christian) cannot adhere to Marxist ideology, to its atheistic materialism, to its dialectic of violence and to the way it absorbs individual freedom in the collectivity, at the same time denying all transcendence to man...."

(Octogesima Adveniens, No. 26.)

Regarding the tactics and strategies of Marxism, we know very well that it does not present itself, especially in the stages of conscientization and propaganda, as an ideology openly anti-religious and atheistic, which would not get sympathizers in a profoundly religious people like ours. Rather, in a subtle and clever manner it is presented as the most genuine expression of authentic Christianity. Its adherents present themselves as "true Christians, who in subversive activities, have found an ambient of faith." "...it is in revolution and in class struggle where you find the experience and evangelical conversion and where are found a new human and Christian identity." (Christians for Socialism, Quebec, 1975.)

The transitory objective of Marxism would be:

"...not to liquidate the Church but to compromise her and put her at the service of the communist revolution."

(Document of the Holy See on the Peace Movement, 1964, No. 9) and "to denounce before the people all the bishops who do not collaborate with Marxism, as contrary to the posture adopted by their authentic Church of Christ, a Church committed to the Poor. (Ibid, No. 8)

In his encyclical Octogesima Adveniens in 1971 Paul VI referred to the danger of allowing oneself to be seduced by the attractive deceits with which Marxism is presented today. One such is the Marxist analysis which claims to be a "...scientific activity, as a rigorous method of examining social and political reality, and as the rational link, tested by history, between theoretical

knowledge and the practice of revolutionary transformation." (No. 33) As for the "scientific analysis," Pope Paul VI warned that "...it would be illusory and dangerous to reach a point of forgetting the intimate link which radically binds them together, to accept the elements of Marxist analysis without recognizing their relationships with ideology, and to enter into the practice of class struggle and its Marxist interpretation, while failing to note the kind of totalitarian and violent society to which this process leads." (Oct. Adv. No. 34)

We do not wish to end our reflection on a topic of such consequence without alerting priests, religious and laity involved in ministry to the real danger of being tempted to reduce the mission of the Church to merely temporal actions. This is: the goals of evangelization to an anthropocentric perspective; salvation to material well-being; the activity of the Church to political commitment. "...If this were so, the Church would lose her fundamental meaning. She would no longer have authority to proclaim authentic freedom in the Name of God." (Evang. Nunt. No. 32.)

In the light of these principles and in fulfillment of our pastoral ministry, we bishops declare that the leftist-oriented political organizations known as FECCAS and UTC are not organizations of the Church and therefore have no right to claim the protection of the Church or use her to achieve their ends.

Priests and religious who direct educational centers and parish communities must refrain from direct or indirect collaboration with FECCAS and UTC and with any other similar organizations whose activities are mainly political (taking over of power) and in addition are leftist. Catholic lay persons responsible for announcing the message of Christ in social, political and

cultural areas, should avoid all association with FECCAS and UTC and any other groups which reflect their principles.

San Salvador, August 28, 1978

Pedro Arnaldo Aparicio y Quintanilla, Bishop of San Vicente

President of the Episcopal Conference

Benjamin Barrera y Reyes, Bishop of Santa Ana

Jose Eduardo Alvarez, Bishop of San Miguel  
Military Vicar

Marco Rene Revelo, Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador

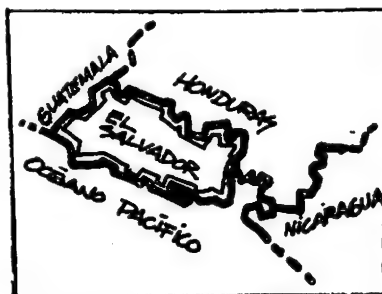
Freddy Delgado A.

Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference

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## **FECCAS-UTC TO THE CHRISTIANS OF EL SALVADOR AND CENTRAL AMERICA** (Mimeo, San Salvador, September 1978.)

The Rural Workers' Union (UTC) and the Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants (FECCAS) send greetings to all Christians: bishops, priests, religious and laity of El Salvador and Central America.

Recently four bishops of our country issued a declaration against our organizations in which they forbid priests and religious to collaborate with us, directly and indirectly. Since the communications media (press, radio and television) are in the hands of the exploiters, the declaration was given immediate wide diffusion.

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*This gives us the opportunity to clarify several points:*

- 1. Who we are: FECCAS-UTC*
  - 2. Who the adversaries are and why they attack us.*
  - 3. How we interpret the aforementioned declaration.*
  - 4. What our position is with regard to Christianity.*
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### **I. WHO WE ARE: FECCAS-UTC**

We are two integrated organizations directed by Salvadoran rural workers and poor peasants, representing and defending immediate and fundamental interests of all rural workers. Therefore we are most closely in touch with the most abandoned sector of citizenry, those who suffer hunger, misery and injustice due to the capitalist-dependency system that rules our country.

Our work and our struggles have been directed first of all to solving our most urgent needs. Next, we wish to gradually increase our strength and experience so that in the tomorrow, united with the working class and other exploited Salvadorans, we can destroy the cause of our

misery: the capitalist-dependency system and attain our definitive liberation.

Within this framework, we have constantly denounced the insatiable exploitation that we suffer, showing how our labor which produces the greatest riches of our country, expands gains for the capitalists and gives us miserable wages. We get less and less to procure basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, education for our children, health care, etc.

During the past four years of struggle we have proven that we concur with the interests of the rural workers. Since 1976, consistent with our effort to get better living and working conditions for day laborers and peasants, we presented yearly legal proposals to the government to raise minimum wages, to improve food and health situations in the haciendas and farms, to reduce land rents, to lower fertilizer and pesticide prices and to decrease interest rates on loans.

Brutal repression is the answer we get from both the wealthy owners and the military tyrants. With increasing violence the legal structure and state organizations defend the dominant classes, making our situation more subhuman and insupportable. Therefore we have concluded that we are the ones who must protect the rights of rural workers.

--In 1977 we peacefully acquired the following lands:  
The Hacienda San Francisco in El Paisnal, San Salvador.  
The Hacienda Guajoyo in Tecoluca, San Vicente.  
The Hacienda San Francisco, Tejutepique, Cabanas.  
The Hacienda Platanares, Zacatecoluca, La Paz.

--On October 10, 1977 together with other branches of the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR) we peacefully took over the Ministry of Labor in order to make them hear our demands and to consolidate our position with the striking workers of the El Leon and Inca factories.

--In March 1978, supported by other groups of the BPR, we peacefully occupied the Cathedral in San Salvador and the Embassies of Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela and Switzerland in order to impede and denounce internationally the massacre which the Army in combination with

ORDEN, had perpetrated against members of FECCAS-UTC and the population in general in the area of San Pedro Perulapan, San Martin, Cojutepeque and Cinquera.

These are only a few of our most relevant actions which we have developed in defense of our class interests. In addition we have implemented hundreds of incidents in various production centers in different parts of the country.

Since 1975 we are part of the BPR thereby allying ourselves with organizations sympathetic to other exploited sectors (urban workers, slum dwellers, teachers, students.) This alliance is based on principles shaped in the interests of the working class and it has enabled us to establish tentative steps in the formation of a Revolutionary Front of the Masses. A worker-peasant alliance with leadership vested in the proletariat is the only guarantee that in the not-too-distant future we will end forever the system of exploitation and injustice and construct a society based on solidarity, equality, collaboration and peace.

FECCAS-UTC, like BPR, has developed without political dependence on the government, political parties, the Catholic Church or any other institution. The fact that we rural workers direct FECCAS-UTC and through our efforts and sacrifices struggle for our own interests, has led to massive incorporation of laborers and peasants from all over the country into the ranks of our organizations.

## II. WHO ARE THE ADVERSARIES AND WHY THEY ATTACK US

FECCAS-UTC has been developing quantitatively and qualitatively, consolidating our alliance with the Federation of Rural Workers (FTC) and penetrating every corner of the country. Therefore we have had to tolerate an increasingly cruel repression from the rich and the military tyrants.

This repression includes calumny, threats, psychological warfare and blockage of communications media as well as violent dissolution of demonstrations and strikes, imprisonment, savage torture and selective and massive assassinations. We have suffered massacres as on March 17, 1978 in the streets of San Salvador, military operations against entire village populations as occurred at Aguilares (May 1977) and San Pedro Perulapan, San Martin, Cinquera and Conjutepeque (March 1978.)

This repression is not because our actions and demands are unjust but rather because they threaten the exploiters in their egotistical and miserly interests. Therefore they use all possible means to eliminate this threat since they are not disposed to cede any of their excessive and unjust privileges. This criminal and shameless repression has opened the eyes of our people and the whole world and shows who the military tyrants are serving. It has also obliged other sectors, organizations and institutions of our country to declare themselves, either to be on the side of the poor and oppressed or in favor of the exploiters.

Thus many teachers, workers, public and private employees, market-women, students, slum dwellers, priests, and religious, etc., even though they do not belong to the BPR, have taken on our struggles and given us their solid support. This inspires us to continue the just struggle for definitive liberation.

On the other hand some, seeking to ingratiate themselves with the dominant classes, attack us directly or indirectly using the usual ways of calumny, threats, etc. There are some who have even urged the Military Tyranny to repeat the bloodbath of 1932. For their efforts they succeed in getting a few crumbs or some miserable privileges.

### III. HOW WE INTERPRET THE DECLARATION OF THE FOUR BISHOPS

Only within this framework is it possible to understand the recent declaration of the four bishops against

our organizations. This declaration, instead of being based on Gospel principles in search of a more just society, is the consequence of a class libation drunk by the four bishops that sign it.

Only thus can it be explained why these four bishops deny to FECCAS-UTC the right "to claim for themselves the protection of the Church" for being "organizations of the left" when they have never denied this protection to ORDEN, the paramilitary government organization which has committed hundreds of crimes and outrages against the working class.

On the other hand one of the four, Bishop Eduardo Alvarez, forms part of the repressive body since he is a colonel in the Army. In our country the military forces rule in a completely political way. (They are in power through fraud and violence.) They have generated military operations against the people and the Church, repudiated not only by the majority of Salvadorans but by other nations of the world. For example, in Aguilares (May 1977) the Army violently repressed all the inhabitants; for several days they were held incommunicado causing sorrow, anxiety and havoc; by force they took over the parish center and the convent converting them into a barracks and prison for several weeks; and they captured and expelled from the country the four priests connected with the parish.

Only thus can it be explained why these four bishops did not speak out against the repressive Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order, nor why there was not the slightest solidarity with the Committee for the Liberty of Political Prisoners which is working so valiantly for the disappeared as well as for political prisoners.

Only thus can it be explained why the dominant classes have received the declaration with such enthusiasm giving it wide coverage in the media. In reality it has produced disillusion, sadness and even rejection by many Christians and non-Christians. We wish to remind the



bishops of the Gospel admonition, "...you cannot serve both God and mammon...." In 1968 Pope Paul VI addressed the peasants of Colombia with these words: "...But today the question has become serious because you have become aware of your needs and sufferings, and like so many others in the world, you cannot tolerate that your conditions should last forever and not receive speedy remedy." Also in the Vatican II documents we read that the Church "recognizes that all believers and non-believers should collaborate in the building up of the world."

Therefore it becomes apparent that there is no basis from a Christian viewpoint for the bishops to prohibit priests and religious from collaborating with organizations like FECCAS-UTC, since we defend the interests of the workers and fight for social conditions of justice and solidarity. As long as the bishops do not give up interests which are isolated from the people's needs nor approach the exploited to see how miserably we live, they will never understand our demands or our struggles.

As for Christians who genuinely love our people, we are certain that they can distinguish between the good shepherds who give their lives for their sheep and those who are mere mercenaries who when the wolf approaches, abandon them, that is, if they don't actually come with the wolf.

#### IV. WHAT IS OUR POSITION IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

As noted earlier, FECCAS-UTC are organizations completely independent from the Catholic Church. It is not necessary to be a Christian to be a member. Nevertheless, many are Christians since our members are mostly laborers and poor peasants. We wish to make clear that FECCAS-UTC respect the convictions and beliefs of each one and in consequence, of every Christian that commits himself to the exploited, fights for our people and is ready to lay down his life for our liberation.

We are happy that in El Salvador there are some bishops, priests, religious and laity, that in various ways have made common cause with us and joined in the just struggle of our people. Insofar as they have done this they have, like us, been attacked, calumniated, tortured and killed by the rich and the military tyrants. Given the framework of CAPITALIST-DEPENDENCE, if one wishes to be faithful to the people, there is no other road but to be ready to suffer these consequences.

We invite all Christians of El Salvador and Central America to support and ally themselves with the just, difficult and heroic struggle that our people have begun for the ultimate victory of liberation.

In particular we issue a call to all laborers and peasants of El Salvador to incorporate themselves into the ranks of FECCAS-UTC. Together let us fight to attain a tomorrow where there will no longer exist exploitation, hunger and injustice.

VIVA the heroic struggle of Central American peoples.

VIVA the worker-peasant alliance.

VIVA FECCAS-UTC.

VIVA the liberation of all workers.

FECCAS-UTC: Members of BPR  
San Salvador  
September, 1978

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**COMMUNIQUE FROM THE SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS SECRETARIATE  
OF SAN SALVADOR REGARDING FECCAS-UTC**

(Mimeo copy, Bulletin No. 44, August 28, 1978, Social Communications Secretariate, San Salvador.)

The Secretariate of Social Communications wishes to collaborate in the diffusion of exact, complete and true information in our country. It also desires that the message of the Church be known in its entirety as well as its complexity. Therefore we wish to clarify some press and radio communications regarding CEDES' (Episcopal Conference of El Salvador) pronouncement regarding FECCAS-UTC.

CEDES did not sign the August 28, 1978 pronouncement; only certain bishops who are members of CEDES did so. The Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar A. Romero, and the Bishop of Santiago de Maria, Arturo Rivera y Damas, who also are members of CEDES expressed their viewpoint regarding the relationship between the Church and Popular Political Organizations in their pastoral Letter of August 6, 1978.

The following is a synthesis of the Pastoral Letter.

1. The bishops are well aware that, despite good will and strenuous effort to refine the political dimension of faith, their pastoral letter leaves many questions unanswered. There is a long road ahead which pastors and people must travel in communion with Christ, reflecting in the light of faith and the social reality of our country.

Therefore they recall the teaching of Paul VI that

"It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church. And with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the

bishops who hold responsibility and in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all men of good will, to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed.  
(Octogesima Adveniens, No. 4)

2. They recall the right of every citizen to organize.
3. They denounce the enormous inequality that exists in our country in the exercise of this right: official approbation depends on whether one belongs to the powerful minority or the needy majority.
4. They remind us that "the mission proper which Christ confided to His Church is not political, economic or social but rather religious. However, it is precisely from this religious dimension that the lights and energies flow that serve to establish and consolidate the human community according to divine law." Because the word of God is a living word which illuminates both sin and grace, informs what must be fought against and what must be built up, it is a word that must not only be heard but carried out.
5. They emphasize that it is the Church which must recognize all that is humane in the cause and struggle of the people, especially the poor, that the Church identifies with the cause of the poor when these demand their legitimate rights. This solidarity with its just objectives is not dependent on certain organizations, whether they call themselves Christian or not; whether they are protected legally or actually by the government or are independent or even in opposition to it. The only condition that matters to the Church and merits support from the Gospel is that the goal of the struggle be just.
6. The global design of liberation which the Church proclaims pertains to the whole man, is centered in the Kingdom of God, proceeds from a gospel vision

of man, demands a conversion of the heart and mind, is not satisfied to only change structures. It generally excludes violence.

7. Faith and politics, while maintaining their own identification, must be united in the Christian who has a political vocation. Faith should inspire the political action of the Christian but without substituting what is typical of faith and Christian justice for that which is typical of a certain political organization. Nor can it be affirmed that only within a certain kind of organization can there develop the Christian demand for justice that flows from faith. Therefore when Christians organize themselves into any kind of association they must respect the autonomy of both dimensions. Non-Christian organizations may ask the Church to call to mind civic rights such as the right to organize, to strike, to demonstrate, to freely express themselves, etc., but no organization even when it is inspired or has a Christian name can demand that the Church or her ecclesial symbols such as preaching, liturgical ceremonies, processions, etc.) can be converted into concrete mechanisms of propaganda for political ends.
8. They presuppose that in order to struggle for justice in a popular organization, it is not necessary to acknowledge explicitly faith in Christ. One can be a good politician if one respects and takes into account the human and social values of the person.
9. To those who profess to be Christians and as such organize themselves, the bishops remind them that they have the obligation to confess and increase their faith in Christ. In their social and political actions they should use methods that coincide with that faith; that the ultimate and absolute criteria for them must be faith in God and the

urgency to realize justice according to the Kingdom of God; that they do not fall into the temptation of affirming that the legitimate political option which their faith inspires them to is the only way to effectively realize the work of justice.

10. They exhort those Christians who no longer profess their faith that they be sincere and not use that faith (which they no longer possess) to attain political ends even though the latter are very just.
11. They rejoice in the work of priests and laity who daily become more committed and incarnated, who are deeply concerned with integral Christian liberation. They caution about the need to preserve evangelical truth and to be fearless in meeting the challenge that this liberation demands.

The bishops understand how it is that priests and their close lay workers deeply committed to liberation, are readily attracted to popular organizations. They likewise understand that when asked, they collaborate in giving Christian guidance to the direction of political activities of Christians for justice. But the bishops advise that when individuals or organizations solicit pastoral cooperation, religious workers must have as their primary objective to be animators of the faith and in the justice that faith demands according to sound Christian principles.

Only in exceptional circumstance and then in a supplementary role should a priest be asked for major collaboration in a concrete political action. It is up to the bishop in sincere dialog with that priest to discern the apostolic value in the projected action.

Lay persons in service to the Church for a special hierarchical mission must be a sign of the unity of all the members of the Church. Therefore the

bishops admonish them to be prudent with regard to sympathizing or aligning themselves with a popular organization. If the militancy in an organization lessens their credibility or efficacy with the People of God, they have to make a choice between being pastoral agents or militants of that organization.

12. With respect to violence, they analyse different types of violence explaining the moral judgment of the Church regarding them and brief applications of the general doctrine of the Church on this subject. They recommend the Christians of El Salvador to believe in peace and not place confidence in violent methods, to work for justice and tap all peaceful means while repudiating fanatical violence.
13. Bishop Romero and Bishop Rivera close their Pastoral Letter making important exhortations to all Catholics, Christians and persons of good will. They address especially those who control the economy, the middle class, professionals and intellectuals, political parties and popular organizations and the Government. They renew the commitment of the Church to support the common good of the country, their faith in Jesus Christ and their collaboration with all who are disposed to bring about justice as the basis for a peace that will be a dynamism of our true progress.

SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS SECRETARIATE  
ARCHBISHOPRIC SAN SALVADOR  
August 29, 1978

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**TO THE BISHOPS WHO SIGNED THE DECLARATION RE FECCAS-UTC**  
(Mimeo, San Salvador, September 1978.)

Your Excellencias:

Your declaration regarding FECCAS-UTC has had a conflictive impact on the people. What is apparent at once is a prejudice that obscures and confuses. Evidently you are on the side of those who wield power rather than that of the weak who suffer the consequences. You attack FECCAS and UTC but say nothing of the horrendous crimes that ORDEN and the misnamed Security Forces commit against them and other popular opposition organizations.

What evidence of Communism is there in these organizations? Is not capitalism with its gross injustices, both now and in the past, guilty of generating Communism? What is the rationale which in order to avoid possible future evils, allows the chaotic situation of insecurity and terror, created by the accursed theory of National Security which denies basic human rights to people? Some young people were arrested on the Guatemalan border for bringing in the record, "The Cardboard House." There are countless similar instances of harassment by the authorities to counter Marxist infiltration.

You are silent accomplices of these kinds of abuse, which far from combatting the danger, actually increase the spread of Marxist ideas. The heroic struggles of these people are not for Communism but against tyranny. The despotic dictators make themselves so hateful to the people that it is easy to understand how propaganda against them readily leads to Communism. The advance of Communism in our ranks owes more to the cruel stupidity of our authorities in connivance with the wicked exploitation by the rich than to the audacity and astuteness of the Communists.



You quote only what the Pope has said regarding Communism. We wish to indicate what he also said about Capitalism: "But out of these new conditions opinions have somehow crept into human society according to which profit was considered the chief incentive to foster economic development, competition the supreme law of economics, private ownership of the means of production an absolute right which recognizes neither limits nor concomitant social duty. This type of unbridled liberalism paved the way for a type of tyranny rightly condemned by our predecessor Pius XI as the source of the internationalism of finance of international imperialism. Such economic abuses will never be rejected as completely as they ought to be because the economy must only serve man." (Populorum Progressio No. 26.)

You denounce FECCAS and UTC for using the Catholic religion to achieve their proselytizing ends. Perhaps this abuse is not as grave as that of bishops and priests who are instrumental in maintaining the system of injustices which crushes us. What other objective can there be at a time like this, paying homage and conferring a decoration on a bishop and on a religious congregation, the continual appearance of members of the hierarchy at the side of oligarchs and public officials both in newspapers and on television? "For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light." (LK. 16-8.)

Between an atheistic communist (and there are sincere and just ones) who loves justice and fights for it, and a capitalist Pharisee (and they abound) who practices religion and fights for the continuance of this system of injustices, you unequivocally are in favor of the latter while the common people decide for the former. You see the speck in the eyes of FECCAS and UTC and do not see the bloodthirsty beam in the eyes of ORDEN with its crimes, of repressive forces and their terrorism, of the government with its massacres, of the press with its

duplicity and lies, of the mordant law which strangles our liberties and rights. With your declaration you side with the oppressors rather than with the oppressed.

If you disapprove of FECCAS and UTC because "...furthermore they are organizations of the left," this implies that you bless ORDEN and ANEP and FARO, because "...furthermore they are organizations of the right."

In this bloody class struggle brought on by the system you, perhaps without intending to, opt for the privileged class and this encourages them to fight against the deprived class. Backed by a government which is neither dignified or courageous, they attack those who are already tied hand and foot with a muzzle on their mouth. This is your greatness vis-a-vis FECCAS and UTC. Quite different is the fearlessness of Bishop Romero who in defense of human rights does not hesitate to challenge the powerful with their injustices to the poor.

If Christ was poor and was always found with the poor, what might be an essential characteristic of his Church? On the side of the oppressed or the oppressors? If Christ was always persecuted and said his followers would also be persecuted, what might be another essential characteristic of his Church: to be persecuted by the rich for telling them the truth or be protected by them for hiding injustices?

The peace of Christ comes by struggling against injustice for he said that he did not come to bring peace but war. But there is another peace that is imposed by force: it is the peace found in cemeteries or the peace of a domesticated beaten animal. What kind of peace do you fight for? Our people fight for the first-named and for this they are persecuted by those who benefit from the second. Silence, in present circumstances, incapacitates the prophet and converts him into a "mute animal." Do you not have the charism of prophets? If not, then allow voice to those who have it.

There is a tremendous paradox here: While there are Communists who risk their lives combatting injustices, there are prelates who benefit by consenting to them. Is not this a powerful reason for the poor and the persecuted to be more open to Marxism than Catholicism? Thanks be to God that there are brave men like Bishops Romero and Rivera y Damas to save the honor of our Catholic faith.

Examine your consciences, you who at this crucial time, receive badges of honor instead of persecution.

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE, VOICE OF GOD

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LADOC: X,1a

Archbishop Romero owns a retreat house in a poor barrio of San Salvador. For many years this has served diocesan groups for meetings and cursillos. On Friday, January 19, 28 young men between the ages of 12 and 20 began a Christian Initiation Course, directed by 34-year-old Father Octavio Ortiz Luna, Sr. Maria Jose Ferrier, and some young helpers.

Early Saturday morning when most were still asleep, a strong contingent of security police violently invaded the building by knocking down the door with a tank. They entered firing high-powered shots. Assassinated immediately was Father Octavio who had responded to the noise of the crashing door. Next they captured Sister Maria Jose along with a woman companion of the Christian Formation team and took them off to the police barracks. They shot and killed four young men and injured one other person.

The police then rounded up all the others in the building: the young students, the cook and some women with young babies. None of these people had fired a single shot since there were no arms in the building. The house was put under guard. The anxious families of the occupants were not given any information. Not even Archbishop Romero was permitted to enter when he wished personally to investigate the crime.

Only after hours of total lack of communication, the National Guard invited the media to photograph the dead bodies, simulating a supposed confrontation between the boys and the soldiers. The National Guard officially informed the media that the slain were terrorists and that the place had been used to produce and store subversive brochures. Later in the day, Sister Maria Jose and her companion were released.

While in El Salvador a priest had been killed, a religious woman imprisoned, a Christian Formation program violently suppressed, the president of El Salvador, General Carlos H. Romero made a statement in Mexico that in his country there was no persecution of the Church.

## **SALVADORAN SECURITY POLICE INITIATE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD**

(Editorial in ORIENTACION, weekly diocesan paper, San Salvador, January 28, 1979.)

In January, 1979 the International Year of the Child was proclaimed in El Salvador, a country where half the population is less than 16 years of age. On the occasion of this event, President Carlos Humberto Romero spoke of "the difficulties that a child encounters when faced with abandonment, lack of understanding, malnutrition and exploitation." Counterpoint to his remark, is the sorrowful incident, also in January, 1979, when the security forces broke up a meeting of young people, imprisoned more than 30 and killed four, two of them under 15 years of age.

Yes, it is sad to be a child today in our country and to grow up abandoned and undernourished. It is macabre to enter life amidst the noise of machine guns, the deafening passage of tanks, fear that your father or mother or brother will not return home because he has disappeared.

These same children grow and begin to reflect, to search for their identity in preparation for useful citizenship in society. They wish to study the Christian faith which is the heritage of our fatherland for more than four centuries. At dawn they are rudely awakened by gunfire, four of their companions are assassinated in their sleep (much as Nelson Rutilio Lemus in Aguilaes and Luis Alfredo Torres in Miramonte previously were killed) and the rest held captive.

If it is a crime to attend a Christian Initiation Course, it indicates that our country is slowly dying. If we are capable of killing the innocence, the joy and the truth of young men it is because we are afraid of innocence and truth.

May the martyrdom of these young people that were on the threshold of adulthood enable us to confront those who have ceased to be human because of their egoism and barbarity.

## **PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH IN EL SALVADOR**

(Editorial which appeared in ECA, 363/364 Jan/Feb 1979)

The small but significant indications that the government was seeking peace with the Church were dissipated when, in the absence of President Romero and contradicting what he had just said in Mexico, security forces carried out an absurd and cruel operation on January 20 in "El Despertar." (See LADOC X, No. 1) To justify this unnecessary display of force and savagery, the police issued a communique full of lies and false accusations against the members of the Church directly involved as well as those implicitly concerned. The unproven claim that certain aggressive elements had fled from the scene is a contrived excuse of the security forces whose veracity is questionable.

In addition to vehemently repudiating this latest crime of the security forces and reaffirming our faith in non-violence as the only sure way to overcome structural violence and the present situation, we firmly support the pronouncement in which the archbishop and the priests of the archdiocese cried, "Enough"; that there be an end to the persecution of the People of God and their pastors. Furthermore, we are obliged not only to denounce the iniquity of those acts but also to search constructively for a way to prevent these actions from reoccurring.

It is evident that the persecution of the Church continues. It is continued in the first place, by word through the press, radio and national television. They dedicate a good portion of their energies, resources and influence to unceasingly attack Archbishop Romero, the priests who follow his lead and all that they represent. Persons of the dominant class attack the Church, the archbishop and almost all the priests on every possible occasion, always emotionally and with little objectivity.

They take advantage of their privileged situation and while injustice permits exaggerated benefits to a few, life becomes more difficult for the majority. The government likewise persecutes the Church either acting alone or allied with the oligarchy and the communications media. It calumniates and denigrates the personhood of the archbishop and the committed priests. It attacks Christian organizations and represses persons whose Christian commitment leads them to political options contrary to the government.

This verbal and written persecution serves in the systematic indoctrination that the Armed Forces and Security Forces receive. It foments in them a hatred against priests, religious and ordinary faithful, who in fidelity to Christ, correspond in a personal way attempting to rid our society of the structural sin of injustice. Those in authority say and repeat to the point of satiety that these priests and committed faithful are Communists, as if this were sufficient excuse to deny human rights to an individual; that they are enemies of the Constitution, of law and order and the very institution of the Armed Forces.

This indoctrination has succeeded in totally confounding the concepts and criteria that would enable the members of the Army and police to be capable of distinguishing between a non-violent, rational and just structural change (which is a political patriotic commitment) and an armed revolution which would be a total subversion of the principles and values of a caring community.

Persecution by word is necessary and many times sufficient for persecution of the Church to be carried out in actions. Therefore those who encourage the former are likewise responsible for the latter. It is hypocritical for those who attack the bishops, priests and faithful who are struggling for justice to pretend to be scandalized by the brutalities of less cultured and incompetent persons towards Church people.

No one should be surprised that certain groups within the security forces, not very well endowed intellectually or morally, and exposed to a systematic indoctrination of hate against priests and faithful through communications media by people they consider legitimate authority, commit errors and abuses so cruel, so shameful and so embarrassing for the government as the massacre at San Antonio Abad.

The government for its part tries to demonstrate that there is no persecution of the Church, indicating that there is division within this Church; that it respects and esteems the Church and that only a small segment of fanatics and dissidents who are politicized and subversive is treated as it deserves according to the laws of the country.

This caricature deceives no one and even less after the January 30 procession through the streets of San Salvador. Although the division of opinions within the Episcopal Conference is a sad reality, the People of God with its priests feel and act, for the most part, within the current of church life which emerged in Vatican II and Medellin. Even though the bishops do not speak and act in accord, one does not therefore say there are two churches, one that is faithful to the oligarchy and the government and in recompense enjoys their favor; and another which denounces abuses and reveals the vices of the structure that maintains them and therefore must be persecuted by word and action.

As John Paul II reminded us in the Dominican Republic, the Church is one. If the Church is one, there can be no pretense that to calumniate, attack and assassinate one part does not necessarily imply harm to the inseparable whole of this body which is the Church. To overcome this situation ought we not to ask why the oligarchy, the government and the Armed Forces feel so threatened by the main current of Latin American Church life.



In the first place we must recognize that in Latin America there have been priests, seminarians, religious and catechists, frustrated and desperate because no effective non-violent message of the gospel in favor of the poor and the oppressed has been forthcoming. They therefore opted for more expeditious methods and some went over to the guerrilla movements. Nevertheless these have been few in number and in no case has this assumed enough importance to affect a local Church and even less the Episcopal Conference or a Regional Conference. It is therefore disproportionate to search in isolated cases of priests who chose violent methods, rational justification for the attacks on the Church.

The root of the problem is that the Church is demanding change in the socioeconomic structures of our countries as an indispensable step in the building of the Kingdom of God. There are persons who do not wish these nor any changes; others who tolerate changes but do not arrive at the root causes of the situations. All these people perceive the changes that the Church demands as contrary to their material interests, to their class privileges, to the continuation of their exercise of power. They feel that this Kingdom of God, in asking of them a conversion that has material and political effects for this world, is a threat to their present social position. They cling to the other concept of the Kingdom of God, one that has spiritual consequences only after death. These persons, as long as they do not have a change of heart, continue living in the preaching of the historical Jesus. The Kingdom of God in history is a personal and concrete threat to their privileged position and they will continue to oppose the Church that carries out a preaching of the Kingdom of God in history.

On the other hand, some people base their opposition and even their hatred of the Church on a mistaken perception of the concrete demands that the Church imposes on them. These demands appear to them, or are presented

to them, totally distorted, exaggerated and false in such a way that they are seen as divisive and threatening. Actually, these are fantasies. Many modern capitalists see the Church as an enemy of all private property, which certainly is false. Others fear that the teaching of the Church reduces the division of work and class, advocating extreme Communist equality. The Church never intends this. Some holding positions of authority, officials of the Armed Forces and security police, have been perversely convinced that the Church wishes to eliminate these institutions. This is absolutely false and cannot be deduced from the criticisms that the Church makes regarding the manner in which these institutions function.

Only those perceive correctly who see the preaching of the Church as a real and objective threat to those who against all rights and justice, look for personal gain, satisfaction of their lust for power or whatever are their objectives in life. The Church is struggling to eliminate these ways of acting but her arms are the Word of God and not the sword of violence.

The persecution of the People of God must cease. It must cease at all levels and in all its modalities if the people and the Church are to be efficacious factors in the process of restoring and consolidating democracy as well as the dialog and appeasement that must precede it. Without the Church in El Salvador, a durable peace cannot be constructed.

San Salvador  
January 31, 1979

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LADOC: X,1c

Archbishop Oscar Romero (San Salvador) on May 15, 1979 proposed some concrete steps to resolve the rapidly worsening conflict between the government and popular organizations. One week previous, police had opened fire on demonstrations in front of the cathedral, killing 23 and wounding 67. Following a Mass for 17 BPR members, 10,000 people marched in the funeral procession.

Subsequent to the Archbishop's statement, President Carlos Humberto Romero on May 17 invited participation in a National Forum. On May 22 BPR leaders organized a peaceful march to take food to their colleagues who were holding the Venezuela Embassy. It ended in a police massacre of 14 BPR members. State of siege was decreed by the government on May 24. At the first session of the National Forum on May 25 pro-government people attended but opposition groups did not, in view of the latest massacre of 14 BPR's plus the fact of the state of siege which precludes the right of expression and association.

#### **ARCHBISHOP ROMERO: LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO END THE CRISIS** (Latinamerica Press, 7 June 1979.)

It is alarming to see how the country's political and economic crisis has rapidly worsened. A conflict is going on between the government and the popular organizations that has affected every sector of the population and even some foreign diplomats. It has cost many people their lives.

The tremendous dimensions to which this conflict has spread reveals the extreme degradation of the people, due to constant abuse from security agents who hold prisoners longer than the law allows or eliminate them. (The conflict was caused by the illegal arbitrary arrest of five leaders of the Revolutionary Bloc BPR: Facundo Guardado, Numas Escobar, Ricardo Mena, Marciano Melendez Duenas, Jose Oscar Lopez Mejia. [Guardado and Mena were subsequently released.]) Above all, it shows that the people are no longer willing to go on putting up with the major structural crisis this country is suffering.

We are not going to pause to study the causes of this crisis since we have already denounced them on various occasions. In addition, experts from the University of El Salvador and the Central American University (UCA) have recently analyzed them. What concerns us is that so far the government has been unable to find any fair solution for the conflict and the structural crisis. We have witnessed acts of violent repression, threats to declare a state of siege, denunciations of subversive plans, distortions of events, etc. All these measures try to hide or curb the problems rather than solve them. By itself, we think that the government lacks the moral authority and backing from the people to be able to carry forward any plan of solution.

Since the Church has a mission to be a factor of unity and peace among men, and since this unity and peace cannot be established except on truth and justice, we feel compelled to make the following proposals, offers and appeals, and we make them to all sectors of the nation.

## PROPOSALS

With regard to the immediate conflict between the government and the BPR:

- We continue to insist that the only just and reasonable way to solve the conflict is for the government to recognize that subordinate officers have committed the abuse of holding or illegally assassinating the three BPR leaders who have still not been sentenced or set free and to punish according to law the ones responsible for this violation of human rights.

It is not enough to keep denying they are in the jails of security agencies. There are reasons sufficient to make us think security agents who have come to look into this type of violation have investigated, proven and denounced other cases. To deny that these BPR leaders are being held is to further increase popular mistrust and a poor international reputation. To admit the offense and punish the responsible persons would indicate a government

desire to begin to solve our country's serious problems. It would also give the government some credibility.

● In case the government mistakenly and unjustly goes on being obstinate by failing to recognize this abuse of power, we propose to the BPR leaders that they set a limited period in which to end this conflict. They have already won their objectives as announced at the time of organizing the campaign they have been carrying out. They gained the freedom of their general secretary and the UCA student. They made it known that security agencies have caused three other prisoners to "disappear." They have had the backing and solidarity of thousands of people who accompanied them in the burial of the victims of the May 8 massacre.

If the government does not comply by trying or liberating the three missing leaders it is probably because it anticipates something disastrous. Most people are already aware and convinced of this.

There are other reasons of a popular humanitarian character which should keep the BPR leaders from being intransigent and cause them to be more thoughtful and agreeable and to stop burning buses, occupying churches and embassies, etc. We need to create a climate that allows for describing, studying and solving the structural problems that are at the root of the worsening decadence.

The people, especially those who are neither aware nor organized, are upset by the burning of buses because it is contrary to their interests.

The hostages you are holding in the embassies need to have their freedom, and some of them have to recover from the tension they have undergone in these days.

In the cathedral and other occupied churches we have to go on with pastoral work for the benefit of the people.

To continue the occupations and to agitate the country is not in line with the objectives yet to be achieved. We do not approve of this.

● We suggest that the special envoys of the French and Venezuelan governments dialogue directly with the negotiating committee. In the dialogue we expect both parties to be reasonable and ready to cooperate for a prompt end to the occupations.

With regard to the country's structural crisis:

We propose that the various sectors, organizations and institutions of the country make an unimpassioned statement presenting briefly and objectively:

- their opinion of the situation in El Salvador;
- their suggestions of concrete realistic proposals to create channels to solve the crisis effectively; and
- what they will be offering out of their capacity and interest to help find a solution.

Once the various groups interested in helping solve the crisis have spoken we propose that there be an analysis of points where they agree and where they differ in their respective positions. Work should begin on the areas of agreement and then be open to public or private dialogue (whichever seems more effective) to discuss the points where they disagree.

## OFFERS

For our part, besides this appeal and our prayers for a solution to these problems regarding the conflict between the government and the BPR:

We have already offered the archdiocesan headquarters as the locale for conversations between the negotiating committee and the special envoys of the French and Venezuelan governments.

We have also shown our willingness to be mediators if both parties request it. So far France's special envoy and the Venezuelan ambassador have asked for our intervention, but the BPR has not accepted it.

Regarding the three prisoners who have not been tried or set free, the Church will continue to be looking out for their fate as it has done with 122 other disappeared

persons. We hope that these illegal arrests which have brought on the present conflict will not continue to occur.

With regard to the structural crisis:

We offer the archdiocesan communications media (Radio YSAX and the weekly newspaper *Orientacion*) for publicizing the various positions as long as they are not offensive and are oriented to enlighten and collaborate to find a solution to these problems.

## APPEAL

So that this national dialogue might go on we ask: *The government* to grant freedom for all sectors of the country to speak and be heard equally.

*The communications media* to help by providing means for all to be able to express their points of view.

Only the generous cooperation of everyone will enable us to begin to resolve this very conflictive national situation.

~~We conclude by calling on all people to collaborate in seeking ways for a solution and we also ask Christians to pray to this end, making the Virgin Mary the intercessor.~~

San Salvador, May 15, 1979.

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*Spiralling violence and the growing militancy of mass opposition organizations have made El Salvador the next potential flash point in Central America. Since May 1979 more than 200 people have died, most the victims of government repression. On August 16 eight youngsters were massacred when leaving the mechanic shop where they worked. The shop owner was also killed. The police explained that they had found books in the shop printed in the Soviet Union.*

*Because of the instability and especially after numerous guerrilla kidnappings, 19 countries have now withdrawn their ambassadors and embassy staff from El Salvador.*

*The social-democratically oriented MNR (Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario) analysed the situation as follows. "In the field of economics we discover notorious stagnation, growing inflation, high levels of unemployment and underemployment and a marked drop in the real wages of the workers. This is due to the high concentration of ownership of the means of production and unequal distribution of income. This generates economic and political power for a few and seriously marginalizes vast sectors from the economic and social benefits or political participation."*

#### **CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS CHALLENGE SALVADORAN AUTHORITIES** (Social Communications Secretariate, San Salvador, 8/15/79.)

We are 248 priests and men or women religious from the dioceses of San Miguel, Santiago de Maria, San Vicente, San Salvador and Santa Ana, representing almost every order and congregation that works in the apostolate in El Salvador. At a recent meeting in the parish of San Jose on the Mountain we reflected on the assassination of Father Alirio Macias and the other five priests killed since the election of the incumbent president of the republic.

The meeting was prompted by the brutal and sacrilegious death of Father Macias on August 4, shot down near the altar of his parish church, St. Esteban Catarina. In his denunciation, Bishop Aparacio stated that he was "killed by three men who were known to the village



people." The people claim that the men were also known by the local security forces. Father Macias recognized them as they entered the church, as also did some witnesses who have since vanished. Suspicions will only disappear when the criminals are apprehended and judged. This has been formally requested by the bishops of San Miguel, Santiago de Maria, San Vicente, San Salvador and Santa Ana.

Small wonder that the two delegates from the Episcopal Conference withdrew from attending the National Forum sponsored by a government which is apparently implicated in the murder. Father Macias' death is a clear case of murder, condemned by the bishops and the American Ambassador. We priests and religious of the Catholic Church in San Salvador feel attacked, threatened and persecuted. There is no longer an excuse for veiled accusations against us such as that there are only a few of us who do not understand the Gospel nor the instructions of our bishops.

As representatives of the Church we turn to you who exert power in El Salvador, to present our viewpoint, our protests and our demands. You are the ones who have public and economic power and therefore are responsible for what occurs in El Salvador.

Father Macias is the sixth priest killed since March 12, 1977. Besides the priests who were murdered, others are presently threatened; 11 have left the country due to death threats; 17 either were expelled or not allowed to enter the country. Many lay people: catechists, ministers of the Word, members of basic Christian communities and pastoral agents have been murdered, jailed, tortured or have disappeared. You who hold power know better than we their number and condition today.

It is thus evident that there is a constant, cruel and systematic persecution of the Church. This persecution is part of the wider repression against the people of El Salvador: 406 murders and 307 detentions in the

last six months. The Church is persecuted because it is on the side of the people who are struggling for justice, for a humane social order, for a place where people will no longer exploit other people. We do not approve of any kind of violence in the struggle for liberation; but neither are we deceived by those who justify themselves and their deeds by crying subversion, terrorism and international Communism.

The murdered priests were neither subversive nor Communists. Their friends know this and so do their parishioners. Likewise the many peasants, trade unionists, teachers and students who were murdered were not subversive, terrorists nor Communists. On June 10, 1974 Bishop Aparicio in his role as shepherd of Chinamequita, visited his flock who had been "brutally sheared and dispersed by orders from higher authorities," according to police. At that time the bishop said: "Preach human rights; teach the peasants how to read and write, tell them their rights as citizens and their duties to the country and to their neighbors, explain to them the meaning of minimum wages, the pay they deserve, teach them to improve themselves, to live with dignity, to feed, clothe and educate their children, to improve their land and to unite in order to help each other. This is not, you exploiters and hedonists, to teach Communism. It means to liberate peasants from the oppression they are subjected to by those who know how to avoid the law because of their powerful public or economic positions."

And we add: it is not Communism to make the right to organize and to defend oneself known to the peasants. They have a right to defend their interests and to promote the political order of their choice, to defend their rights effectively, to denounce abuse by authorities or agents of the powerful. It is simply carrying out the Gospel mandate, a duty the Church must not refuse or avoid. Neither can the people who in part thanks to the Church, have become aware of their own dignity and the

fact that they form the majority in a nation made sovereign by their Constitution.

"Our people are not the same today as they were yesterday," said the bishop. "By means of social communications they have become aware, they have had their eyes opened to know and understand their rights and duties. Sacred Scriptures, especially Jeremias and Luke, have helped." Today they know that they must claim their liberation or it will pass them by.

Repressive violence does not make institutional or structural injustice disappear. Daily more people will rise up. For every peasant or worker brought down, dozens will emerge. For every priest murdered, the Church's commitment will increase. Repression will not bring peace to the country. The only road to peace is the road of justice and that is the road the powerful refuse to undertake.

We are advised of new measures that will bring the country out of chaos: small wage increases that are immediately followed by large price increases, national dialogues and forums, promises of free elections, etc. But nothing will help if people have lost faith. The people cannot believe authorities when they see ever-increasing violence, if outstanding individuals continue to disappear and if life's battles daily grow worse. If the people lose faith, the best promises and political maneuvers are in vain. We maintain that the people do not believe nor can they do so. The Church we represent likewise has lost faith in fancy words which later are contradicted by machine guns.

Many of us are on the verge of political despair. A desperate people in our geopolitical reality, can easily turn to civil war. Justice must be the answer to this desperation, but the powers in command do not give this answer. If the authorities continue to violate the most basic rights grounding their actions on the Constitution, the people protected by this same Constitution may have to follow paths heretofore unknown and unimagined.

We are fully aware of the seriousness of this situation as we experience it in our own flesh. Thus we have a mission to demand that the authorities put an end to this repression at once; that there be no more murders, no more "disappeared," no more unjust and illegal ways of crushing popular protests. Above all we demand that the repressive, intimidating and accusatory activities of military and paramilitary groups be stopped; that the paramilitary organization ORDEN be dissolved as was recommended by the O.A.S. We also demand that the murderous urban guerrilla UGB (White Warriors Union) and other terrorist groups be stopped. We are convinced that the public authorities of the nation can stop the killings of the rightist terrorist groups. They have done it before. The government can condemn Father Macias' killers even if they are connected to the police forces. If they do not, they will be doubly guilty of the spiral of violence in which El Salvador is drowning.

We want to remind especially the Army that the Constitution mandates them to see that the laws are obeyed and rights are guaranteed. Today the law is not obeyed nor are the Constitutional rights of the people of El Salvador guaranteed.

August 11, 1979.

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**SALVADORAN BISHOPS PUBLICLY PROTEST MURDER OF FR. MACIAS**  
(Social Communications Secretariate, San Salvador,  
8/15/79.)

As we extend our condolences to our sister-diocese of San Vicente, we, the bishops of Santa Ana, San Salvador, San Miguel and Santiago de Maria and our respective clergy, strongly protest the horrendous sacrilegious assassination of Father Alirio Napoleon Macias, pastor of San Esteban parish. We demand:

1. That the civil, judicial and military authorities investigate thoroughly this assassination as well as the other treacherous acts and that they take measures to safeguard existing laws which expressly defend the lives of all Salvadorans.
2. That his Excellency, the Apostolic Nuncio, intervene immediately with the urgency that the case warrants, in order to end this wave of assassinations of priests and that this murder does not go unpunished as the five previous ones.
3. Furthermore we ask effective protection for all priests. When there is any kind of individual conflict, there must be immediate recourse to the competent ecclesiastical authority.
4. Finally we call on all the inherent strengths of our country to work together so that with the help of the Divine Savior of the World, Patron of our republic, there be an end to this wave of crimes which is stigmatizing our beloved Salvadoran country.

San Salvador  
August 10, 1979

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The socio-political circumstances of the country at the time when Bishop Romero assumed the role of archbishop of San Salvador determined in great part his standpoint and pastoral posture. He was truly a pastor, a prophet, a friend, a brother and a father to his people, especially the poor, the defenseless and the margined. Archbishop Romero was the voice of the voiceless.

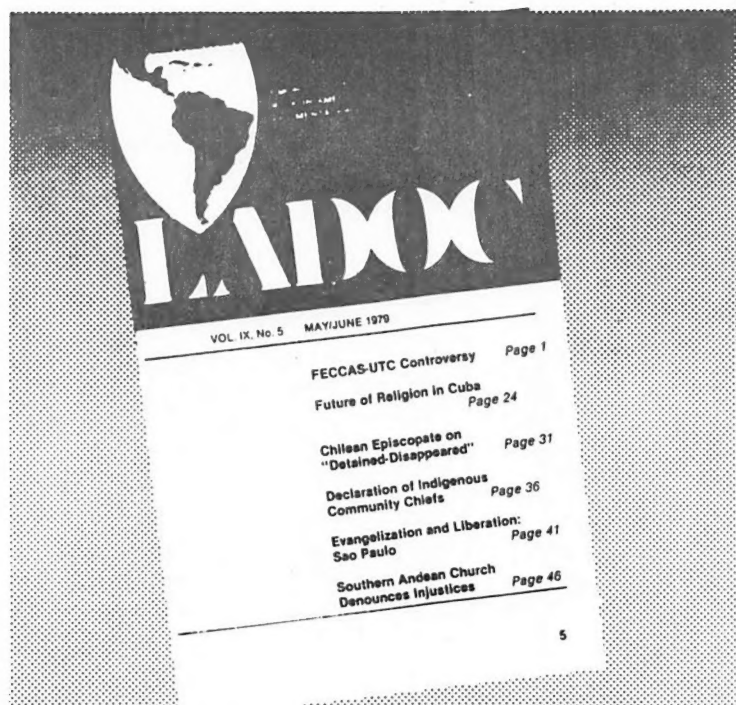
In his Sunday sermons he denounced personal and social sin and summoned everyone to conversion. He was a humble man and a good listener and therefore learned how to confront the grave problems that menaced the Church and the people. Gifted with discernment he knew how to speak the Word--strong, merciful, clear, penetrating and timely.

Archbishop Romero assimilated unto himself the bloodshed, the sorrow and the apprehensions of the suffering people. As a good pastor, he gave his life moment by moment. Sustained by prayer, he courageously faced strong challenges and great difficulties.

Due to Romero's defense of human rights he became recognized internationally. Countless letters pledging solidarity reached him from all parts of the world. He received the following distinctions:

- a) An honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from Georgetown University, February 14, 1978.
- b) Nomination for the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize by the British Parliament, November 23, 1978.
- c) An honorary degree from the University of Louvain in recognition of his defense of human rights, February 2, 1980.
- d) The International Peace Prize from Sweden's Academy of Ecumenical Action for his work of reconciliation and especially for his significant defense of the oppressed, March 9, 1980.

Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated on March 24, 1980 as he was celebrating Mass in the chapel of the Hospital of Divine Providence. He was terminating his homily when simultaneously with a flash photo, a bullet struck him, killing instantly.



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